

Provost Eaker, Dean Sanford, our beloved administrators and professors, Dr. Osborn, Dr. Crider, Dr. Rhame, and our Cistercians, reverend Father Maguire and Father Thomas – and of course, Class of 2016 - thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today.

But, I must confess, I didn't want to write this speech. Not because I did not feel the honor of your confidence, or the privilege of speaking for you and to you, my dear friends and faculty. But because I knew this speech would mean that we had really and truly come to the end of our time here.

I was sitting outside of Gorman, feeling sorry for myself, giving way to all the emotions which "the end" tends to bring – nostalgia for the rosy-colored past, a bleak and bitter attitude towards the future, and a general feeling of agedness which comes with a maturity of twenty-two years. I would like to say these profound feelings prompted me to write deep reflections or thoughtful musings which would enable me to offer you that key piece of life advice which we are all looking for. Or at least that I cut a romantic figure sitting staring like "The Thinker," meditating on my future. In reality I was accomplishing nothing and looking grumpy.

While in this Poe-like state, I heard my name called from the path to the print lab. "Hey Kitty, guess what? I just finished my annotated essay!" a happy young voice from a freshman friend called out, as she proudly flourished a document above her head. "I'm sure there are mistakes in it, but I am done!"

And I, the proud senior, 10-page and more paper veteran, filled with worries and grumpiness, was humbled. A freshman shared with me honest joy in a work which had cost so many hours and days. She had finished the crowning academic achievement of her first year, and saw it for what it was – a job she had worked hard at, learned much from, and was proud of handing in to the hands of a professor she had learned to love and respect. I think we all know what that feels like.

When we leave UD, I hope that we are all like this this freshman: proud and humble, continuing to do well because we care, learning because we love it, and working hard because it's worth it. There is no complacency in this attitude; it is not the attitude of a quitter. It is a lot closer to the attitude of St. Paul, who, at the end of missionary journeys, can rightfully claim "I have competed well; I have finished the race." We all get burnt-out. We all have sleepless nights and rough mornings, tough conversations and frustrating assignments. We all cry and we all laugh. We can all do our best, and continue a task which we were never told was easy, but which we all know is worth it. On my desk is a little picture and quote which my dad gave to me before freshman year, which says "courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying, 'I will try again tomorrow.'"¹ And we will try again. And again. And maybe once or twice more after that.

For if UD has taught us anything, it has taught us that, as Chesterton claims, dragons exist - but so do heroes who can conquer them. We are setting out again into a world where if you make a joke about the Aeneid, people might not get it. We will soon be around people who don't actually take for granted the fact that Human Life is absolutely beautiful. We cannot enter such a world jaded, tired, frustrated, worried, or, even, grumpy. Having been given what in Rome Monsignor Fucinaro always called such an "embarrassment of riches," what business do

¹Attributed to Mary Anne Radmacher

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we have not celebrating at every moment our participation in and knowledge of the great tradition of the Catholic West in which we have been taught to find those greatest gifts – truth and wisdom, knowledge and joy.

But we cannot celebrate this alone. And, although, I fully intend to see you all again in Heaven and at Groundhog, this is the last time we will truly all be present in this way. And what about our teachers – our professors, who have guided and inspired us, believed in us, loved us – if today we celebrate a success, is it not just as much a celebration of our teachers, who were able to turn a gaggle of disoriented freshman into a community of seniors?

And this is one of my two great fears in leaving UD - that I will not have the courage to continue alone, without you, my comrades, and you, my teachers. If I have accomplished anything, if I have learned one true thing or loved one thing rightly, it was because you wouldn't let me do anything other than my best, wouldn't let me settle for anything other than excellence. Facing the world with you was daunting. Facing the world without you seems impossible.

But whenever this fear comes, and whenever I start to dread the day when we will be "alone," I think back to a favorite memory of UD - an interrupted commencement speech given by our dear Dr. Hatlie. You see, in Rome, to say "thank you" to our beloved Rome Director, we had prepared, as a class, a song that meant, we hoped, a great deal to him. We wanted to thank him for everything he had done – for, like many of our teachers here, he was much more than just a professor.

And so we learned the simple Irish tune, "The Parting Glass." We practiced at our own underground "Monday Night Meetings," secretly passing around pages of lyrics. We were ready to "give" him this song – to sing it for him – at the end of our last night in Rome.

But our plans were thrown off a little, because apparently he also thought it an appropriate way to say goodbye. As his closing speech at the farewell ceremony drew towards an end, and we were already sore from laughing and on the verge of crying, he brought-up this song, told us how much it meant to him, and began to softly recite the haunting lyrics of this little song of farewell.

Well, we couldn't let him stand alone, and, when he had finished reciting the verses, in a moment which I still can't quite rationalize, I interrupted Dr. Hatlie, because it had suddenly become obvious that it was not right for him to raise the Parting Glass alone. The voice which I used to interrupt him was about five and half octaves higher than usual, so he couldn't really recognize who it was by the voice. But when he looked around, he couldn't recognize it by the face either, because I wasn't standing by myself. Every other student - the entire class - was standing with me to say a very unconventional but completely genuine and heartfelt "thank you" to a professor with whom we had only just realized how much we shared in common.

Class of 2016, thank you for never letting me stand alone at any point during these four years. What we began as isolated freshmen, pursuing a truth we couldn't quite identify, we are finishing as a community, ready to take to the world what we have been so blessed to receive.

So even though you won't be in the seat next to me a few short days from now, even though you may be half-way across the world this time next month, even though there is a chance we won't all make it back for Groundhog (but don't mess-up the Heaven thing – I expect to see you there), there is an assurance which can be felt, a confidence which can be received, in

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knowing that we are all working towards the same glorious end – knowledge of truth, as it is found in love. No matter where we go, no matter how far away we are – we will always know that somewhere else in the world our classmates of today are standing-up for the same truths that we will be fighting for – so we're not ever really alone.

I have one more fear. I fear that you, my friends, may face suffering and uncertainty. That you might get hurt. That you might be asked to do things which even the most courageous dragon-slayer would find daunting. I don't ever want you to get hurt. I wish I could take away all the possibility of you ever suffering, of you being uncertain, of you feeling alone. Yet as I have looked around me these past few weeks, trying to memorize your faces, and trying to bottle-up the feelings which being a part of this community has prompted, I have finally begun to realize something I should have known long ago. That we have grown. A lot. That you, my friends, are now beautiful men and women of faith, pursuers of truth, students of wisdom, and lovers of mankind - as beautifully flawed as it is. And I will strive to no longer do you the disservice of doubting that you would do anything other rejoice in the opportunity to work, suffer and live in the service of that truth which we all came here to find, and which we all leave here to spread.

We have come to an end, and it is time to turn the page and accept, for better or worse, the conclusion to this part of our story. But this is not the end of our education, any more than that first annotated essay on Dante or Milton was the end of our academic assignments. But we should take time to recognize that for all the mistakes, for all our personal imperfections, all our regrets, what we have accomplished here, together, has been something quite beautiful, and something which we can now take and turn with pride to our guides who brought us to this moment, and offer with gratitude our heartfelt thanks for their inspiration and love. "*We are not the sum of our weaknesses and failures;*" Pope Saint John Paul II tells us, "we are the sum of the Father's love for us."² Let us be nothing less than saints, and nothing more than joyful. God bless.

² Homily by Pope Saint John Paul II, given in Toronto, Downsview Park, Sunday July 28, 2002.

A.M.D.G.

The Parting Glass

Of all the money that e'er I had
I spent it in good company
And all the harm I've ever done
Alas, it was to none but me

And all I've done for want of wit
To memory now I can't recall
So fill to me the parting glass
Good night and joy be to you all

So fill to me the parting glass
And drink a health whate'er befalls
Then gently rise and softly call
"Good night and joy be to you all"

Of all the comrades that e'er I had
They're sorry for my going away
And all the sweethearts that e'er I had
They'd wish me one more day to stay

But since it fell into my lot
That I should rise and you should not
I'll gently rise and softly call
"Good night and joy be to you all,
Good night, and joy be with you all."³

³ Traditional, lyrics found online.